

All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism 2021 Annual General Meeting Minutes

Monday 26th April



Attendees:

Huw Merriman MP
Christina Rees MP
Marion Fellows MP
James Gray MP
The Rt Hon. Caroline Nokes MP
Sir Graham Brady MP
Kieran Mullan MP
Sharon Hodgson MP
Baroness Uddin
Paul Bristow MP
Jane Hunt MP
Staff from the office of Darren Henry MP

Tim Nicholls and Lucy Williams - The National Autistic Society, Secretariat to the APPGA

Welcome from the Chair

Huw Merriman MP – who chaired the meeting on behalf of the late Dame Cheryl – welcomed attendees. He began the meeting by paying tribute to the incumbent Chair of the APPG, Dame Cheryl Gillan, who sadly passed away earlier in the month. He said that the APPG owed a great deal to her chairmanship and it would be the responsibility of all members to ensure that the success that she created continued into the future. He went on to say that, whilst he was grateful to act as the Chair of the APPG for the time being, the position would have to be filled by another member in the near future who could give the position the dedication it requires. The acting Chair then set out the agenda of the meeting. It was agreed, due to members having other engagements, that the formal business of electing the APPG's executive would be given priority.

Election of the APPG's Officers and Chair

- Huw Merriman was elected as Chair of the APPG on Autism
- Lord Touhig and Jonathan Reynolds MP were re-elected as Vice Chairs
- Paul Bristow MP was also elected as a Vice Chair
- Dr Lisa Cameron MP, Christina Rees MP, Cat Smith MP, Lord Warner Baroness Hollins, Lord Sterling, Marion Fellows MP, Baroness Uddin, John Howell MP, James Cartlidge MP, Helen Hayes MP, Darren Henry MP, Sharon Hodgson MP and Kieran Mullan MP were all re-elected as Officers of the APPGA

Tributes to the Late Dame Cheryl Gillan

Once the election of the APPGA's executive was finalised, the Chair asked members if they had any memories of Dame Cheryl they wished to share. The group heard tributes from Baroness Uddin, Christina Rees MP, Marion Fellows MP, Sharon Hodgson MP and Peter Bristow MP. They all spoke of Dame Cheryl's friendship, determination, mentorship and ability to connect with people even when they held different views to her own. Huw Merriman MP concluded the reflection on Dame Cheryl's life by thanking her office staff for their support and asked that they continue to remain involved with the APPG.

Income and Expenditure Statement

The APPGA unanimously approved the group's income and expenditure statement.

2020/2021 Report from the Chair

The Chair followed the approval of the APPG's income and expenditure statement by highlighting some of the group's achievements over the previous year. He began by talking about the '10 Years On' report and how it effectively covered a range of subjects that are key to autistic people's lives. Huw said the APPG's unique approach of allowing members to take the lead on one topic each was an example for other APPGs.

The Chair went on to congratulate the APPG for holding a successful reception to mark ten years of The Autism Act. He said that the event was well attended by a variety of people, including ministers, MPs, campaigners and those with lived experience. Huw emphasised how the reception was a time for celebration – with there now being a regularly reviewed autism strategy in place – but it also shone a light on how more needs to be done for autistic people.

The Chair then spoke about how the group had worked closely with other APPGs, noting the group's collaborative work on access to mental health provisions with the APPGs on disability and learning disabilities. He also said that the APPG's work with the European Human Rights Commission in November 2020 on autistic people's experiences of the criminal justice system was an example of how the APPGA has proven its ability to work closely with organisations external to Parliament.

In addition, the Chair was pleased to report that over 150 MPs and their staff – including the Minister for Social Care – had attended the APPG's Understanding Autism sessions. He said that the sessions were raising awareness about autism and improving the ability of parliamentary staff to support autistic people.

Before concluding the meeting, Huw Merriman focused on the APPGA's recent work investigating how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted autistic people. He stressed that it was a difficult time for all, but it was clear that autistic people were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and steps would have to be taken to address this.

AOB

Huw Merriman asked members to do their part to ensure that the APPG remains as effective as it was under the chairmanship of Dame Cheryl. He said that many promises have been made by the Government to better support autistic people, and he said it was the responsibility of all members to make sure these promises are kept.

The Chair concluded the AGM by thanking the National Autistic Society for its role in administrating the APPG.

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